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NATO Alliance at Forty May 1989

Background: On April 4, 1949, representatives of 12 European and North American countries gathered in Washington, DC, to sign the North Atlantic Treaty, establishing an alliance aimed at deterring aggression and safeguarding their shared values. President Truman said: "...If it had existed in 1914 and in 1939, supported by the nations who are represented here today, I believe it would have prevented the acts of aggression which led to two World Wars."

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has grown since 1949 to 16 members: Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, the Federal Republic of Germany (1955), Greece (1952), Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain (1982), Turkey (1952), the UK, and the US. It has proved to be one of the most durable and successful alliances of free nations in history. For four decades, NATO has provided the security shield behind which Western Europe has recovered from the devastation of World War II; built prosperous and growing economies; anchored democratic governments; and forged a new, unprecedented era of European economic, social, and political unity.

Three principles: The NATO alliance's longevity and success rest upon three bedrock principles:

- Collective security. An armed attack against one or more of them shall be considered an attack against them all;
- Flexible response. A potential aggressor should have no doubt that any attack, whether conventional or nuclear, entails risks and retaliation out of proportion to any possible territorial military or political gain; and
- Political dialogue based on adequate military strength. A military shield is at the heart of NATO, but it has always sought negotiation and dialogue with the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies.

Today, as 40 years ago, it is an exclusively defensive alliance: its members hold no territorial claims against the Soviet Union or other members of the Warsaw Pact, seek no unilateral military advantages, and assert no political demands outside NATO.

Cornerstone of American foreign policy: NATO remains a cornerstone of American foreign policy. Our transatlantic partnership, of which NATO is an important part, rests on America's commitment to the shared values of peace, democracy, free markets, and human rights and an acknowledgment of the bonds--of peoples, culture, and history--that knit together the European and North American countries. George Bush has stated, "NATO is the best investment in peace we have ever made."

Unity and security: NATO has proved its political unity and durability over the years. The Soviet suppression of the Hungarian revolt in 1956, the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961, the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia, the occupation of Afghanistan in 1979, and the Soviet decision to walk out of intermediate-range nuclear force

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(INF) negotiations in 1983 all have underscored the need for Western unity and strength in protecting peace.

NATO's vision and cohesion have led to substantial progress in lessening tensions and improving East-West relations. The resolve of the alliance in carrying through with INF deployments against strong Soviet opposition made possible the INF Treaty, which, for the first time in the history of arms control, eliminated an entire class of nuclear weapons. This success is but one example of how political dialogue must be based on a strong defensive deterrent.

For more than 13 years, NATO allies have worked closely to ensure that the East honors obligations taken as part of the 35-nation Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) process. These efforts have borne fruit in political reforms we see today in some of the Eastern bloc countries. At the Vienna negotiations on conventional armed forces in Europe (CFE), NATO is seeking to eliminate the Warsaw Pact's overwhelming and destabilizing superiority in conventional forces. Although problem areas exist, initial Warsaw Pact proposals reflect Soviet acknowledgment of the conventional imbalance and offer the prospect of a constructive dialogue. NATO countries also are participating in new negotiations on confidence- and security-building measures (CSBMs) in Europe. The goal is to increase openness regarding military purposes, deployments, and maneuvers.

Challenges and opportunities: NATO faces difficult issues in the years ahead. Given Soviet conventional force advantages, it must first maintain public support for a strong defense, including reliance on nuclear weapons, while negotiations to reduce the risk of confrontation proceed. Second, its members must examine the sharing of roles, risks, and responsibilities within the alliance and must continually adjust their force posture to changes in the security balance in Europe. Last, as an alliance of democratic nations, NATO must continue to show political acuity in reaching common positions on vital issues that affect our mutual political and security interests.

Although the future holds challenges for NATO, it also offers opportunities for further improvement in relations with the East. In addition to reductions in conventional forces and an extension of confidence-building measures, NATO is united in seeking:

- A global, verifiable ban on chemical weapons;
- Strengthened human rights commitments and contacts within the CSCE process; and
- Expanded economic, technical, and scientific cooperation among NATO members.

NATO faces the future with confidence and optimism. Having demonstrated strength, success, and resiliency since its founding 40 years ago, the alliance looks to the next decade as an opportunity to grow further as a community of nations. On the basis of its shared heritage, values, and objectives, it will continue to seek an expanded dialogue with the East aimed at reducing Soviet military hegemony, while promoting the rights of free countries and free peoples.

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